

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
COLUMBUS, OHIO 43210
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HAVE WE FAILED YOU?

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PRESIDENT JENNINGS, MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, COLLEAGUES IN THE FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION, HONORED GRADUATES AND YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

THROUGH THE YEARS, THROUGH COMMENCEMENTS TOO NUMEROUS TO MENTION, I HAVE REACHED THE CONCLUSION THAT ONLY TWO THINGS CAN DETRACT FROM THE EXCITEMENT AND COLOR OF A GRADUATION CEREMONY. THERE IS, OF COURSE, THE WEATHER OVER WHICH NOT EVEN THIS FACULTY HAS ANY CONTROL. AND THEN THERE IS THE SPEAKER—THE LAST BARRIER STANDING BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR DIPLOMA. SPEAKERS HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO DISPEL THE MAGIC OF THIS RITUAL BY GOING DOWN TOO DEEP, STAYING DOWN TOO LONG AND COMING UP TOO DRY. SO, ALTHOUGH MY REPUTATION ON CAMPUS IS THAT I GO 48 MINUTES NON-STOP, SOMETIMES WITHOUT BREATHING, I INTEND TO FOLLOW THE ADVICE OF A FAMOUS BRITISH PRIME MINISTER TO A YOUNG AND EAGER PARLIAMENT MEMBER ON THE OCCASION OF THE LATTER'S FIRST SPEECH TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS. SAID DISRAELI, "BE BRIEF. IT IS BETTER TO HAVE THEM WONDERING WHY YOU DIDN'T SPEAK LONGER, THAN WHY YOU DID."

DESPITE OUR IMPRESSIVE TECHNOLOGICAL ACHIEVEMENTS, THE U. S. IS CURRENTLY DROWNING IN DISTRUST, FEAR AND DESPAIR. WE FEEL IMPOTENT TO HALT THE DRIFT TOWARD NUCLEAR CONFRONTATION, UNABLE TO REVERSE THE PROBLEMS OF WORLDWIDE HUNGER AND OVERPOPULATION, UNABLE TO BRING PEACE TO WARRING PEOPLES, AND UNABLE TO PREVENT EVEN THE LEAST DEVELOPED NATIONS FROM ACQUIRING THE CAPABILITY FOR DESTROYING THEIR NEIGHBORS AND INVOLVING US IN AREA CONFLICTS IN EVERY CORNER OF THE GLOBE. ON THE DOMESTIC SIDE, THE ECONOMY IS IN RECESSION, UNEMPLOYMENT IS ESCALATING

TWO INCOME FAMILIES ARE BECOMING A NECESSITY, PRIVATE HOME OWNERSHIP IS BEYOND THE REACH OF MOST YOUNG PERSONS AND THERE IS COUNTRYWIDE HYSTERIA ABOUT CRIME IN THE STREETS. THERE IS ANGER AT BEING VICTIMIZED BY WHITE COLLAR CRIME, NOW MORE GENEROUSLY REFERRED TO AS CORPORATE AND GOVERNMENT FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE. THERE IS UNEASE ABOUT TERRORISM, RANSOM KIDNAPPINGS AND KILLINGS AND ROBBERIES. AND THERE IS PESSIMISM ABOUT OUR ABILITY TO REPAIR THE ECONOMY AND TO RESTORE CIVILITY, SAFETY AND SANITY TO THIS COUNTRY WITHOUT DESTROYING CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES.

THIS CLIMATE OF FEAR, DISTRUST AND DESPAIR WHICH CHARACTERIZES OUR TIMES HAS INEVITABLY PENETRATED THE TOWER OF LEARNING. NOT EVEN THE UNIVERSITY CAN TOTALLY INSULATE ITSELF FROM THE CURRENTS OF DAILY LIFE. STILL, THERE ARE CERTAIN FUNDAMENTAL VALUES IN UNIVERSITY LIFE WHICH MINIMIZE THE IMPACT OF THIS PERVADING FEELING THAT WE CANNOT CONTROL OUR DESTINY. THOSE VALUES INCLUDE:

(1) A SENSE OF HISTORY--THE UNIVERSITY IS, AND IT ALONE IS, THE REPOSITORY OF KNOWLEDGE ACCUMULATED THROUGH THE AGES. KNOWLEDGE OF THE PAST PROVIDES INSIGHTS INTO THE PROBLEMS OF THE PRESENT AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE FUTURE. HISTORY IS DESTINY. THE PAST IS PROLOGUE. AT THE SAME TIME, THE UNIVERSITY MUST NOT BE IMPRISONED BY THE PAST OR BOUND BY RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED BY PRACTICAL OR IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS. REMEMBER THAT NO THOUGHT, NO IDEA, NO HYPOTHESIS, NO CONCEPTION, HOWEVER OUTRAGEOUS IT MAY SEEM, IS ALIEN TO THE UNIVERSITY. THE UNIVERSITY MUST ALWAYS BE ABOVE, BUT NEVER UNAWARE OF, THE TURBULENCE, CRISES AND NEEDS OF EVERYDAY LIFE. AS A LIVING, VITAL, REGENERATIVE ORGANIZATION, THE UNIVERSITY MUST REMEMBER THE PAST WHILE IT SHAPES THE FUTURE. AS THOMAS HUXLEY WROTE JUST BEFORE THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, THE MEDIEVAL UNIVERSITY LOOKED BACKWARDS; IT PROFESSED TO BE A STOREHOUSE OF OLD KNOWLEDGE.... THE MODERN UNIVERSITY LOOKS FORWARD, AND IS A FACTORY OF NEW KNOWLEDGE."

(2) A SENSE OF UNITY. WHILE STUDENTS AND FACULTY ALIKE ARE USUALLY IMMERSED IN THEIR SPECIALTIES AND ARE OFTEN OBLIVIOUS OF OTHER DISCIPLINES, THE UNIVERSITY IS THE ONLY PLACE WHERE THE FINE ARTS, HUMANITIES, LIFE SCIENCES, PHYSICAL SCIENCES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, AND ALL THE DIRECT APPLICATION DISCIPLINES ASSOCIATED WITH THEM, ARE BROUGHT TOGETHER UNDER ONE TENT, SO TO SPEAK, THE ARCHEOLOGIST AND THE FUTURIST, THE AGRICULTURALIST AND URBANOLOGIST, THE PETROLEUM ENGINEER AND ECOLOGIST, THE GENETICIST AND "BIG BANG" COSMOLOGIST ALL WORK IN THIS HEADY ENVIRONMENT.

(3) THE UNIVERSITY IS THE MOST DEMOCRATIC OF INSTITUTIONS. WE VALUE ACHIEVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE, NOT RACE, SEX, ETHNICITY, RELIGION, INCOME OR OTHER SUCH EXTRANEOUS ATTRIBUTES.

I WOULD BE FOOLISH TO ARGUE THAT OUR SELECTION, RETENTION, AND PROMOTION DECISIONS ARE BASED SOLELY ON PERFORMANCE AND TOTALLY EXCLUDE OTHER CONSIDERATIONS. NOR ARE ADMISSIONS DECISIONS TO GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL WORK FLAWLESS IN THIS RESPECT. BUT HAD THESE OTHER ATTRIBUTES BEEN THE ULTIMATE CRITERIA, I WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN HIRED AT OHIO STATE AND CERTAINLY WOULD NOT BE STANDING HERE AS YOUR COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER.

(4) THE UNIVERSITY IS A HOPEFUL ENVIRONMENT. WITHIN ITS CONFINES IDEAS ARE DEVELOPED, ARGUED, TESTED AND TAUGHT. TODAY'S OUTRAGEOUS HYPOTHESIS IS TOMORROW'S PRACTICE. THE IMPROVEMENTS IN THE QUALITY OF LIVES IN THE FUTURE ARE BEING RESEARCHED NOW. WHAT COULD BE MORE HOPEFUL? FUTURISTS KNOW THAT THEIR MOST OPTIMISTIC PROJECTIONS ARE LIKELY TO BE TOO CONSERVATIVE. COULD ANYONE HAVE PREDICTED OUR SUCCESSFUL PROBES INTO SPACE, OUR BIOMEDICAL REVOLUTIONS, THE ADVANCES IN AGRICULTURE, THE GREENING OF THE WORLD, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICA FROM THE PREEMINENT INDUSTRIAL NATION TO THE PRE-EMINENT HIGH TECHNOLOGY, SERVICE SOCIETY?

AT THE SAME TIME, PESSIMISM, EVEN SUB-CLINICAL DEPRESSION BEING A SPECIAL

PROFESSIONAL HAZARD, I WONDER WHETHER WE HAVE NOT ALREADY TRANSFORMED THE UNIVERSITY FROM A TOWER OF LEARNING TO AN ASSEMBLY LINE PRODUCING KNOWLEDGE, BOTH BENEFICIAL AND DETRIMENTAL, TO HUMAN WELL-BEING IN ITS APPLICATION. IN NO SPECIAL ORDER, PERMIT ME TO VOICE SOME OF MY CONCERNS ABOUT THE THREATS TO THESE VALUES AS I CONTEMPLATE THE FUTURE IN THE LIGHT OF THE WAY THINGS WERE HERE IN THE AUTUMN OF 1951, THE TIME 31 YEARS AGO THAT I JOINED THE OSU FACULTY.

1. THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, THE FLAGSHIP OF ALL INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN THIS STATE, IS SUFFERING FINANCIAL PROBLEMS TO AN UNPRECEDENTED DEGREE. IT IS OF NO SPECIAL COMFORT TO ME, AND I TRUST TO YOU, TO LEARN THAT NEARLY ALL MAJOR UNIVERSITIES ARE IN SIMILAR OR EVEN WORSE FISCAL CONDITION. AND, AS PARENTS AND RELATIVES OF THE GRADUATES, THOSE OF YOU IN THE STANDS KNOW FULL WELL THE MEANING OF FINANCIAL EXIGENCY. NO DOUBT SOME OF YOU, AND MANY OF OUR GRADUATES, HAVE WONDERED AT TIMES WHETHER A COLLEGE DEGREE IS WORTH THE SACRIFICE. MORE TO THE POINT, WILL WE REACH THE SITUATION WHERE THE DEMOCRATIC VALUES WE ESPOUSE WILL BE UNDERMINED BY FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS? WILL DESERVING STUDENTS HAVE TO FORFEIT THEIR EDUCATIONAL FUTURES BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN PRICED OUT OF THE EDUCATION MARKET IN MAJOR CENTERS OF HIGHER LEARNING? IS EDUCATION ONCE AGAIN TO BECOME A CLASS RATHER THAN A MASS OPPORTUNITY? WILL THE ABILITY TO PAY OUTWEIGH COMPETENCY AND MOTIVATION TO LEARN AS A CRITERION FOR COLLEGE ADMISSION? WILL IT TAKE ANOTHER SPUTNIK TO JAR US INTO OUR SEARCH AND SUPPORT OF TALENTED PEOPLE AND INTO PROMOTING AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FREE AND OPEN TO ALL WHO WANT TO LEARN, WHO WANT TO EXCEL?

2. SPECIALIZATION AND FRAGMENTATION. ALL OF US ARE ACUTELY AWARE THAT THE UNITY OF THE UNIVERSITY IS BEING THREATENED BY THE INCREASING FRAGMENTATION OF FACULTY AND STUDENTS BY SCIENTIFIC SPECIALTY. MOST OF US ARE COMMITTED TO THE MASTERY OF A FIELD OR EVEN ONLY A SUB-SPECIALTY WITHIN IT. WE OFFER 6700 FORMAL COURSES RANGING FROM THE MICROSCOPIC TO THE GLOBAL, FROM PRE-HISTORY TO THE

PRESENT, FROM ANCIENT LANGUAGES TO THE BANE OF EDWIN NEWMAN'S EXISTENCE, TONGUES THAT ARE VERY MUCH ALIVE AND STILL EXPANDING. IN TRUTH, OVER-SPECIALIZATION IS MAKING THE UNIVERSITY A TOWER OF BABEL.

3. THE LITIGATION MANIA IS UNDERMINING THE TRANQUILITY AND HOPEFULNESS OF THE UNIVERSITY. AT SOME TIME OR OTHER, EVERY UNIT ON CAMPUS HAS ^{BEEN} ~~IS~~, OR WILL BE FACED BY THE THREAT OF A LAW SUIT. THE MOST NOTABLE HAVE INVOLVED PROMOTION, TENURE, SEXUAL HARRASSMENT, SEXUAL AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, AND, MORE RECENTLY AND OMINOUSLY, THE OWNERSHIP OF IDEAS AND SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES WHICH HAVE COMMERCIAL IMPLICATIONS. WHILE LITIGATION IS SOMETIMES VITAL IF JUSTICE AND EQUITY ARE TO PREVAIL AND IF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES ARE TO SERVE THE PUBLIC WEAL, THE LITIGATION FAD HAS NEVERTHELESS INSTITUTIONALIZED PARANOIA ON CAMPUSES NATIONALLY, RUPTURED RELATIONSHIPS AMONG PEERS AND DESTROYED PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL TRUST. HOW CAN YOU MAINTAIN A COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS WHEN ADVERSARIAL PROCEEDINGS MAY BE TRIGGERED BY NEARLY ANY MAJOR DECISION. TO PREVENT THE INEVITABLE DAMAGE INHERENT IN LITIGATION, OR EVEN IN ITS EVER-PRESENT THREAT, ENDLESS PROCEDURES HAVE BEEN INSTITUTED TO DOCUMENT EVERY ASPECT OF EVERY DECISION. WE ARE DROWNING IN DIS-TRUST--A LEGACY OF THE LEGITIMATE AND NECESSARY DUE PROCESS REVOLUTION DISTORTED OVER THE YEARS TO FOCUS ON THE PROCESS AND TO FORGET THE DUE.

4. QUALITY OF EDUCATION. WITH THESE AND OTHER THREATS TO THE UNIVERSITY, THE VERY QUALITY OF THIS INSTITUTION IS IN JEOPARDY. ALTHOUGH THE DIFFICULTIES ARE EXAGGERATED, RETRENCHMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION MEANS FEWER OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG STAFF MEMBERS. AS A RESULT, UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES HAVE BECOME WAY STATIONS FOR ITINERANT TEACHERS AND RESEARCHERS WHO HAVE HAD THE MISFORTUNE OF ENTERING THE ACADEMY IN THE LATE 1970'S RATHER THAN IN THE EXPANSIONIST 1960'S. WITH NO FUTURE ON A MAJOR CAMPUS, ON SPECIFIED TERM CONTRACTS, UNDER MICROSCOPIC INSPECTION FOR WARTS, IT IS UNREASONABLE TO EXPECT THEM TO INVEST IN TEACHING LET ALONE BE LOYAL TO AN INSTITUTION WHICH PROMISES THEM ONLY A FIXED DATE OF TERMINATION.

ON THE OTHER END OF THE SPECTRUM ARE THOSE WHO HAVE INVESTED HEAVILY IN OHIO STATE, WHO HAVE MET AND SURPASSED THE STIPULATED CRITERIA OF EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING, RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY SERVICE. MANY OF THESE CAREERISTS ARE MORTIFIED BY THE THOUGHT THAT THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION HERE AND ELSEWHERE HAS BEEN SLIPPING--THAT UNLESS ADEQUATE STATE SUPPORT, MORE STRINGENT ADMISSION STANDARDS, AND HIGHER PERFORMANCE LEVELS ARE REQUIRED, OHIO STATE WILL BECOME AN ALSO-RAN AMONG OUTSTANDING UNIVERSITIES. THIS WE CANNOT TOLERATE.

YOU ARE NOW GRADUATING. DESPITE THESE PROBLEMS, AND IN RETROSPECT, HAVE WE CONVEYED TO YOU THIS SENSE OF HISTORY, SENSE OF UNITY, SENSE OF THE VALUES AND LIMITS OF TECHNOLOGY, A FEELING OF HOPEFULNESS AND A BELIEF THAT EACH OF US CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE COURSE OF HUMAN EVENTS? WHEN YOU THINK BACK TO YOUR STUDENT DAYS, ASK YOURSELVES WHETHER THE UNIVERSITY DELIVERED ON OUR STATED PROMISES TO TEACH AND TRAIN YOU, TO MAKE YOU CURRENT IN YOUR FIELD AND, ABOVE ALL, TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE SURVIVAL AND BETTERMENT OF ALL PEOPLE EVERYWHERE?

WE, THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, HAVE FAILED YOU, THE GRADUATES OF THE LAST CLASS OF 1931, IF WE HAVE NOT TRANSMITTED TO YOU THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TO PREPARE YOU FOR YOUR CHOSEN CAREER AND BROADENED YOUR HORIZONS IN THE PROCESS. WE HAVE FAILED YOU IF IN ACCOMPLISHING THIS OBJECTIVE, WE HAVE NOT ALSO IMPRESSED YOU WITH THE NEED TO CONFORM TO THE HIGHEST ETHICAL AND MORAL STANDARDS IN THE PURSUIT OF YOUR PROFESSION AND HAVE NOT IMBUED YOU WITH FEELINGS OF COMPASSION, A PASSIONATE BELIEF IN JUSTICE AND IN EQUITY, AND A SENSE OF NOBLESSE OBLIGE. AS OUR FINEST, WE MUST ASK MORE OF YOU THAN WE DO OF OTHERS LESS PRIVILEGED AND LESS FORTUNATE. IT IS VITAL, IF OURS IS TO REMAIN AN OPEN, FREE AND JUST SOCIETY THAT YOU, WHO WILL SOME DAY ASSUME LEADERSHIP ROLES, UNDERSTAND AND ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPROVING THE LOT OF OUR "UNDERCLASS"--THAT LARGE UNDERBELLY OF AMERICAN LIFE THAT IS DEALT WITH BY OUR SHAMEFULLY INADEQUATE MENTAL HEALTH,

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC AND PRIVATE WELFARE ESTABLISHMENTS.

WE HAVE FAILED YOU IF YOUR TOLERANCE FOR AMBIGUITY IS NO GREATER NOW THAN WHEN YOU CAME HERE AS FRESHMEN. TO MANY OF THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS THERE ARE NO FIRM ANSWERS. WE HOPE WE HAVE EQUIPPED YOU TO PROBE FOR ANSWERS THE REST OF YOUR LIVES.

WE HAVE FAILED YOU IF YOUR LEARNING IS AT AN END; IF YOU DO NOT RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR CONTINUED INTELLECTUAL INVOLVEMENT.

WE HAVE FAILED YOU IF WHAT YOU LEARNED HERE AS UNDERGRADUATES AND POST-GRADUATES IS STILL YOUR STATE-OF-THE-ART KNOWLEDGE FIVE OR TEN YEARS FROM TODAY. INNOVATIONS IN THE PROFESSIONS OCCUR WITH SUCH SPEED THAT YOU ARE BEHIND EVEN WHEN YOU ARE CURRENT. KEEP ABREAST. BE OUT FRONT. AND INSIST THAT WE, AT YOUR ALMA MATER, DO TOO.

WE HAVE FAILED YOU IF YOU ARE SO DEDICATED TO YOUR PROFESSION AND CAREER THAT EVERYTHING ELSE IS SECONDARY, AND IF YOU USE MATERIAL WELL-BEING AS THE MEASURE OF YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THIS WORLD. REMEMBER THE ADMONITION, "IF I AM NOT FOR MYSELF, WHO WILL BE? IF I AM ONLY FOR MYSELF, WHAT AM I?"

WE HAVE FAILED YOU IF YOU CONFUSE PERSONAL PROBLEMS AND SOCIAL ILLS; IF YOU THINK THAT THE DISTRUST, CYNICISM AND DESPAIR OF OUR TIMES CAN BE REMEDIED BY MORE AND BETTER GADGETRY; BY SIMPLE ANSWERS TO COMPLEX ISSUES.

WE HAVE FAILED YOU IF YOU THINK ETHICAL AND MORAL CONCERNS IMPEDE PROGRESS.

WE HAVE FAILED YOU IF YOU ARE UNWILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS, UNWILLING TO FIGHT FOR EQUITY AND JUSTICE.

WE HAVE FAILED YOU IF YOU ARE CONTENT WITH THE STATUS QUO AND FEAR CHANGE.

WE HAVE FAILED YOU IF YOU DO NOT FEEL A DEBT OF GRATITUDE TO THOSE WHO HAVE SUPPORTED AND COMFORTED YOU DURING YOUR FOUR OR MORE YEARS HERE. AND THAT INCLUDES YOUR PARENTS AND SPOUSES AND THE TAXPAYERS OF OHIO WHO HAVE PAID ABOUT A THIRD OF THE COST OF YOUR EDUCATION.

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY HAS NOT FAILED YOU.